



The Muslim Council of Britain

Guidance on Swine Flu and its affect on the Muslim community

Why is it called swine flu?

Like human influenza outbreaks occur among certain animals such as pigs and poultry. Influenza viruses are normally specific for the animal species. However, like human influenza virus, animal influenza viruses also change their characteristics such as ability to cause human infection and/or ability to spread among humans. The current pandemic strain (Influenza A H1N1) originated from pigs hence commonly known as swine flu – the official term is Influenza A (H1N1).

How does Influenza spread?

The virus spreads through droplets created while talking, sneezing or coughing – up to 1m distance; it may be acquired also through contaminated surfaces or objects.

What is special about swine flu?

Seasonal influenza occurs every year therefore many people will have some immunity from infection or vaccine. However, with a new virus like the current H1N1, there is little or no immunity. Hence infection may be rampant. Furthermore, its characteristics may change in time to cause more severe illness.

This new influenza A H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading fast especially among young people (aged 10 – 45 years). Individuals with underlying medical conditions are at increased risk of complications.

Muslims do not eat pork, can they still get swine flu?

Yes. This is because influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) does not spread by eating pork.

How do I know I have swine flu?

It is not possible to tell the difference between seasonal flu and influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) without medical help. Commonly reported symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, headache, muscle and joint pain, lethargy and muscle aches. Some people have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and

diarrhoea.

How can I protect myself from catching influenza A (H1N1)?

Infection is transmitted through droplets created while speaking, sneezing or coughing - and can spread the virus up to a distance of 1m. Infection may be prevented by avoiding close contact with people who show influenza-like symptoms (maintain a distance of about 1m if possible). The following measures may be useful:

- Avoid touching mouth and nose
- Wash hands with soap and water (or antiseptic hand gel) after touching the mouth, nose or likely contaminated surfaces
- Avoid contact with people who might be ill,
- Reduce the time spent in crowded settings, whenever possible
- Practise healthy habits, including adequate sleep, eating healthy nutritious food, and keeping physically active.

Does wearing a mask help?

- If you are not sick, you do not have to wear a mask
- It may be useful to wear mask if you are caring for someone who is sick
- If using a mask, make sure you are aware of the “do’s and don’ts” of wearing a mask
- Using a mask correctly is essential.
- **Incorrect use of masks actually increases the chance of spreading infection.**
 - ➔ Masks should cover the mouth and nose
 - ➔ Masks lose their effectiveness and should be discarded when they become moist
 - ➔ Disposable masks must be discarded in bins safely

What should I do if I think I have Influenza H1N1 (swine flu)?

If you feel unwell, have high fever, cough or sore

throat:

- Stay at home – take rest and plenty of fluids
- Prevent others from catching the infection:
 - keep away from work, school
 - Avoid contact with friends and relatives during the period of your illness
 - Avoid crowds and mass gatherings (eg mosques)
 - Use tissues and dispose of appropriately (catch it, bin it, kill it)¹
 - Clean your hands immediately after with soap and water (or use antiseptic hand gel)
 - Pain reliever is adequate for aches – choose non-aspirin pain reliever for children and young adults.

When should someone seek medical care?

Medical care should be sought if the individual experiences shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, or if a fever continues more than three days. Parents should seek medical care if an ill child has fast or laboured breathing, continuing fever or convulsions (seizures).

What can Mosques and Mosque Committees do prevent spread of infection?

Modern day Infection control principles are an inherent part of Islamic teachings. **Imams and Committee members are best placed to elaborate on the following principles during *khutbas*.**

- duty to prevent harming others
- importance of cleanliness (half of one's faith),
- Islamic requirements for frequent hand washing e.g. *wudu* and other daily routine),
- keeping away from infected areas and if already in an infected area, to remain there until the infection has subsided

- Consider providing tissues and facilities for safe disposal of used tissues
- Encourage use of existing facilities to wash hands frequently
- Opportunistic education and increased awareness may be achieved among children attending supplementary schools (Madarssahs) .

Swine Flu and Hajj:

- The Saudi Arabian authorities invited a panel of renowned international experts to an international consultative workshop in Jeddah to discuss preventive measures against communicable diseases at the forthcoming Hajj, with a particular emphasis on influenza A H1N1 pandemic.
- The experts observed that while infection with the current pandemic strain remains mild to moderately severe compared with seasonal influenza, it was more likely to be severe in certain groups of individuals and therefore recommended that the
- Elderly; pregnant women; people with chronic diseases and children postpone their participation in Hajj and Umrah for this year 'in order to better ensure their health and well-being".
- Healthcare practitioners in MCB concur with this advice from the Saudi Arabian authorities and their international experts and urge Hajjis and Umrah pilgrims who embark on this spiritual journey to adhere to "good personal hygiene measures, including cough etiquette, use of antiseptic hand gels, and frequent hand washing with soap and water".

The situation is being closely monitored and advice may be modified as necessary. Updates will be made available.

Prepared by the Muslim Council of Britain's Health Committee

For further information about the pandemic, visit:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/QA.aspx>